

From the Wall Street Journal's Louise Radnofsky:

Congressional Democrats warned House Oversight Chairman Darrell Issa (R., Calif.) that his probe of how federal agencies are handling Freedom of Information Act requests could overburden the bureaucracies.

Mr. Issa wrote to 180 agencies last week asking for logs of FOIA requests filed in the past five years, as well as all communications between the requestor and the agency for requests which weren't fully answered within 45 days. He wants the answers by Feb. 15.

But three Democrats on the oversight committee said in a [letter](#) to Mr. Issa sent Wednesday that the request for communications went too far, since there were more than 133,000 backlogged requests in the 2008 fiscal year, and over 77,000 in 2009. Getting all the communications between the agencies and requestors for those backlogs could get really hard, the Democrats said.

“It is difficult to estimate how many pages of documents would be responsive to your requests, but it is safe to say it would be in the hundreds of thousands, if not more,” said the letter, which was signed by Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the top Democrat on the committee, and Reps. Peter Welch of Vermont and Gerry Connolly of Virginia.

“Without a defined focus, your inquiry will place a significant burden on FOIA offices and divert limited staff from processing requests from the public,” they wrote.

The letter also expressed concern about agencies handing over names of people making FOIA requests. Republicans believe that they need this to be able to determine whether particular requests could have been delayed for political reasons.

The Democrats are asking Mr. Issa to hold back on the communications part of his request for now, and meet with the agencies in charge of FOIA compliance and the FOIA officers themselves.

Read the full story [here](#) .